

## **Early Childhood Education is the Foundation for Learning and Readiness for School**

- *Recent research on early brain development demonstrates that a child's early experiences form the foundation for learning.* In fact, from ages 0-3, 90% of a child's brain is developed. If children do not receive high-quality early learning experiences, the learning readiness gap has been set.
- *High-quality early childhood education is one of the most effective strategies to ensure children begin school with the skills they need to succeed* and is associated with higher reading skills, better test scores and fewer behavioral problems. Low quality care can have the opposite effect.
- *Parents need to be informed consumers so they can know that their children are in high-quality early childhood settings.* Children may spend 30-40 hours per week for as long as 5 years in out-of-home care before they start kindergarten. Arizona regulates for health and safety of some out-of-home care, but does not measure the quality of that care.
- *Early childhood education includes:* parent education and family support programs, child care, preschool, family child care, relative care, Early Head Start and Head Start, full-day kindergarten, early intervention and linkage to health services.

## **High-Quality Early Childhood Education is a Key Component of the State's Economic Vitality**

- *Arizona has one of the worst dropout rates in the nation and achievement scores have consistently been below the national average.* Children who are not reading by the third grade are at a greatly increased chance of never catching up and achieving proficiency and dropping out of school.
- *A better-educated workforce will help Arizona's economy by attracting new business and workers to the State.* The 2001 Morrison Report "Five Shoes Waiting to Drop" found that the quality of the State's education system is the number one priority that can attract new business and knowledge economy workers to the State. In other words, Arizona's poorly performing education system deters business from coming to Arizona.
- *A young person who drops out of school has a high chance of becoming a drain on the economy, rather than a productive member of society.* Thus, it is in all of our best interests to give children the tools they need early on for success. Studies have demonstrated that for every \$1 invested in high-quality early childhood education, there is a corresponding \$8 in long-term savings in criminal justice, welfare and other costs.
- *Business and community leaders throughout the State understand the importance of high-quality early childhood education* and are bringing their leadership and resources to build a stronger system for Arizona. There is a great deal of momentum in the public and private sectors to begin revamping the system.

## **Voluntary Full Day Kindergarten**

Arizona requires that schools provide voluntary half-day kindergarten. The Governor is proposing legislation to change the funding for voluntary full-day kindergarten by counting kindergarten children as "1" instead of "1/2" in the school funding formula. In 2004, the Governor is seeking an appropriation to begin to phase-in voluntary full-day kindergarten for schools that have 90% or more of their children on free and reduced lunch.

Children who attend full-day kindergarten are better prepared to succeed in 1<sup>st</sup> grade and beyond. Research has demonstrated that full-day kindergarten can lower grade retention, improve language and math skills, lead to higher achievement test scores in 8<sup>th</sup> grade, and improve attendance and social skills.

## High Quality Early Childhood Education

Governor Napolitano has outlined a five year plan to do the following:

### **Ensure that Parents know their children are attending high quality early childhood education**

- *To provide parents with information rating the quality of their child's care* the Governor's plan calls for development of a statewide quality rating system for child care, similar to North Carolina's 5 Star Quality Rating System. It took North Carolina 10 years, but today 79% of their centers are 3 stars and higher. Approximately 10% of Arizona child care centers have some form of national accreditation, but there is no state system for quality improvement.
- *To increase the state's investment in high quality preschool* the Governor recommends that as full day kindergarten is phased-in, the \$19.4 million in the Early Childhood Block Grant (ECBG) should be re-directed to high quality preschool.
- *To assist child care programs to improve the quality of licensed child care*, the Governor's budget calls for the addition of more health and safety-licensing workers. In addition, the budget calls for development of a team of early childhood development specialists to help child care centers and preschools improve their quality.
- *To build public-private partnerships to address the state's education needs* the Governor will establish an "Early Education Fund," a private fund to help to build quality early childhood education at the local level. Donations will be tax-deductible and managed by a private foundation.

### **Increase the pool and retention of qualified early childhood education professionals**

- *To provide educational opportunities for early childhood professionals*, the Governor's Office and ASU are partnering on a \$1.6 million federal grant to educate 300 early childhood education teachers.
- *To increase the opportunities for early childhood professionals to obtain additional education*, the Governor's plan calls for the development of a statewide scholarship program, for early childhood education teachers.
- *To enhance the wages of early education professionals* (the average wage of an Arizona early education teacher is \$8 per hour) the Governor's plan calls for development of a statewide wage program for early childhood education teachers.

### **Improve children's access to health care**

- *To increase the number of children who receive well-child health screens* the Governor will work with AHCCCS to: 1) increase the number of children who are screened through EPSDT (Early Periodic Screening and Diagnostic Testing), 2) improve physician training and thereby the diagnosis and referral of children with developmental delays and 3) provide training to child care staff to screen for oral health needs.
- *To provide child care providers and preschools with access to health professionals*, the Governor's plan recommends the development of a statewide health consultation system.

### **Help low-income families remain employed with support to afford the cost of child care**

- *To assist families who earn low wages to afford the cost of child care*, the state provides a portion of the payment for child care for children of poor families who have incomes up to 165% of the federal poverty level (\$25,179 for a family of 3 or \$12.20/hour). However, the majority of families that receive the child care subsidy make far less.
- *To make an investment in our children*, the State should devote resources toward bringing down the number of families on our child care subsidies waiting list.